

REMARKS

Claims 1, 7, 8, 18, 24 and 25 remain pending in this application. Claims 2-6, 9-17, 19-23 and 26-48 have been withdrawn from further consideration, without prejudice, as being drawn to non-elected inventions or species. Claims 1 and 18 have been amended.

In view of the above amendment and the following remarks, Applicants request reconsideration of this application.

Response to Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 1, 7, 18 and 24

Claims 1, 7, 18 and 24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brandt (US 5,892,905) in view of McCaslin (US 6,868,397). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Claim 1 is directed to a method of rental equipment management for a plurality of rental locations on a network that has at least one computer-server for communicating with users. The method includes displaying a reservation summary having reservation information pertaining to the type of equipment reserved and the date of reservation for a plurality of customer reservations. The method also includes tracking the equipment inventory information for each rental location for managing equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations. Claim 1 has been amended to clarify that “the equipment inventory information for each rental location is accessible via the network by all of the other rental locations on the network.”

Claim 7 depends from and includes all of the limitations of claim 1.

Claim 18 is directed to a method of rental equipment management for a plurality of rental locations. The method includes displaying on a screen in communication with a computer a reservation summary having reservation information pertaining to the type of equipment reserved and the date of reservation for a plurality of customer reservations. The method also includes tracking equipment inventory information for each rental location for managing equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations. Claim 18 has been amended to further include the step of “making the reservation information and the equipment inventory information

for each rental location accessible via a computer network by all of the other rental locations of the plurality of locations.”

Claim 24 depends from and includes all of the limitations of claim 18.

In the present Office Action, the Examiner confirms that Brandt does not teach or suggest a method of rental equipment management having the features recited in each of claims 1, 7, 18 and 24. The Examiner concludes, however, that it would have been obvious to incorporate the teachings of McCaslin (the secondary reference) into the disclosure of Brandt (the primary reference) to achieve a method having the features of Applicants’ claims.

Applicants respectfully disagree for two reasons. First, Applicants submit that there is no suggestion or motivation in the cited art to use McCaslin to modify Brandt to achieve Applicant’s invention. Second, even if there were such a suggestion or motivation, the combination of McCaslin and Brandt does not teach or suggest all of the features of Applicants’ invention.

No Suggestion or Motivation to Combine McCaslin with Brandt

In the present Office Action, the Examiner reiterates that the motivation to combine the teachings of McCaslin and Brandt is to make known the availability of equipment at any rental location. Applicants respectfully suggest, however, that if the Examiner is suggesting that the stated motivation is to make information at each of a plurality of rental locations known to all of the other locations (as opposed to making it known only to a central location), such motivation comes from Applicant’s specification, not from McCaslin.

McCaslin is directed to a very different purpose than Applicants’ invention. Specifically, McCaslin is directed to an information system for tracking, monitoring and evaluating equipment inventory used by electric utility distribution companies. This system addresses the problem of tracking equipment inventory in order to fill orders from a central inventory location and to retrieve equipment to the central inventory location. See McCaslin at col.8, line 64 – col. 9, line 5, and FIG. 5. McCaslin, however, does not address the more complex inventory tracking problems experienced in the moving equipment rental business, as does Applicants’ invention. As explained in Applicants’ specification, the moving equipment rental business is a dynamic

business wherein hundreds of reservations are made in a day and the inventory is constantly moving from one rental location to another, where customer orders need to be filled. That is not the type inventory tracking problem to which McCaslin is directed. Only Applicants' invention is directed to this problem.

Because of these differences, Applicants respectfully suggest that the record does not present any suggestion or motivation to combine McCaslin and Brandt.

Response to Examiner's Official Notice

The Examiner previously took official notice that equipment management systems are used in auto rental locations that manage equipment availability. In the present Office Action, the Examiner cites applications by Williams (US 2003/0149600A1) and Yamaguchi et al. (US 2002/0087334A1) as evidence supporting this official notice. Applicants respectfully submit, however, that the cited evidence does not support the Examiner's rejections.

As Applicants have previously discussed, the inventory at a car rental location remains relatively static because the vast majority of car rental transactions involve the customer picking up a car at a location and returning the car to the same location. This is true notwithstanding the fact that car rental companies previously have allowed customers to rent a car at one location and return it to another. Thus, rental car companies historically have not had a need for each rental location to track equipment inventory at other rental locations. Neither Williams nor Yamaguchi et al. teaches or suggests anything to the contrary.

Yamaguchi et al. is directed to a method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device. Yamaguchi et al. does not discuss vehicle rental methods other than to observe that "[i]t is possible, in the case of a car or truck rental, for a customer to rent the vehicle in one location and return it to a different location." See paragraph [008]. While Yamaguchi et al. recognizes this possibility, nothing in that reference rebuts Applicants observations that such transactions are not the norm for the rental car business and that rental car companies therefore have not had a need to track equipment inventory information for each of a plurality of rental locations and to make that information is accessible by all of the other rental locations of the plurality.

Williams is directed to a computer method and system for reserving an item such as a vehicle rental. Like Yamaguchi et al., Williams recognizes that a car rental customer can choose to return a vehicle to a different location than the pick-up location. *See* paragraph [008]. Again, however, nothing in Williams suggests a need by the rental car industry to track this information for a plurality of rental locations to manage equipment availability at the locations.

Applicants respectfully submit, therefore, that claims 1, 7, 18 and 24 are patentable over Brandt and McCaslin, taken either alone or in combination.

The Examiner's Proposed Combination Does Not Teach or Suggest Applicants' Invention

In any event, even if it were proper to combine Brandt and McCaslin, Applicants respectfully submit that the proposed combination does not render claims 1, 7, 18 and 24 unpatentable. Neither Brandt nor McCaslin teaches or suggests tracking equipment inventory information for each of a plurality of rental locations for managing equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations, as recited in Applicants claims. On the contrary, only Applicants' specification teaches making the equipment inventory information for each rental location accessible via the network to all of the other rental locations on the network.

Thus, the combination of Brandt and McCaslin does not teach or suggest the elements of claims 1, 7, 18 and 24. Applicants respectfully submit, therefore, that those claims are patentable over Brandt and McCaslin, taken either alone or in combination.

Claims 8 and 25

Claims 8 and 25 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brandt in view of McCaslin and further in view of Craig (US 6,266,277). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Each of claims 8 and 25 is directed to a method of rental equipment management that includes the step of updating reservation information and equipment information regularly and alerting the user upon the detection of an update failure.

Applicants previously argued that it is improper to combine Craig with either Brandt or McCaslin. Craig does not address reservation information or equipment tracking, does not disclose a reservation summary or fields for reservation information or equipment tracking and is

not concerned with the problem of managing equipment availability at a plurality of rental locations. Although the Examiner does not appear to dispute this, he has maintained the rejection, concluding that it would have been obvious to combine the teachings of Craig with Brandt and McCaslin to provide update alert failure notifications because such notifications “allow the user to determine when updates have problems.” Applicants respectfully disagree.

Craig is directed to a method of controlling the operation of a memory system. Nothing in Craig discusses or suggests the applicability of this method to a reservation and equipment management system.

In any event, even if it were proper to combine Craig with Brandt and McCaslin, Applicants respectfully submit that the proposed combination does not render claims 8 and 25 unpatentable. Craig does not cure the deficiencies of Brandt and McCaslin discussed above. For example, Craig does not teach or suggest tracking equipment inventory information for each of a plurality of rental locations for managing equipment availability at the plurality of rental locations. Thus, the combination of Brandt, McCaslin and Craig does not teach or suggest the elements of claims 8 and 25.

Applicants respectfully submit, therefore, that claims 8 and 25 are patentable over Brandt, McCaslin and Craig, taken either alone or in combination.

Conclusion

All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicants therefore respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider all presently outstanding rejections and that they be withdrawn. It is believed that a full and complete reply has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and that the present application is in condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal

communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number provided.

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Respectfully submitted,

/Richard E. Oney/
Richard E. Oney
Registration No. 36,884
Tiffany & Bosco, P.A.
2525 E. Camelback Road, Third Floor
Phoenix, Arizona 85016
Tel: (602) 255-6094